

August 14, 2026

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of the State of New York
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, New York 12224

Re: The 25th Anniversary Commemoration of September 11, 2001

Governor Hochul:

We write as retired Police Officers of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey - men and women who devoted our careers to protecting the World Trade Center and the people who worked in and visited it. All of us responded to, worked through, and were directly affected by both terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center—February 26, 1993, and September 11, 2001. For reasons stated below, we respectfully but unequivocally demand that you do not attend this year's September 11th ceremony at Ground Zero.

For us, the World Trade Center was far more than a group of buildings or a symbol on the New York skyline. It was our home. The Port Authority owned and operated the complex, maintained its headquarters there, and entrusted our officers with protecting it around the clock for more than fifty years. We knew its buildings, corridors, streets, employees, and visitors. We served there, built our lives and families while serving there, and lost brothers, sisters, friends, and colleagues there.

On September 11, 2001, thirty-seven Port Authority Police Officers were murdered while carrying out the oath they had sworn to uphold. Forty-seven civilian members of the Port Authority family were also murdered. The loss of thirty-seven members of one police department remains the largest loss of police officers in a single incident in American history. The tragedy did not end that day. Retired and active first responders continue to suffer and die from illnesses associated with their exposure to the toxic environment at Ground Zero.

Twenty-five years later, those wounds have not healed. The memories remain painfully vivid for the families of our fallen officers and colleagues, as well as for the first responders, survivors, workers, and residents whose lives were permanently changed by the attacks.

For that reason, we were deeply troubled by YOUR decision earlier this year to illuminate One World Trade Center in accordance with your proclamation of Muslim American Heritage Month. We recognize and respect your authority as Governor to issue such proclamations, whatever the motivation might be. Our objection is not to your exercising your power as Governor to do it; rather, our concern and objection is with one of the locations you chose, namely the WTC.

One World Trade Center stands on ground inseparably connected to two attacks carried out by radical Islamist terrorists. Selecting that particular site for this observance showed, in our view, a serious lack of sensitivity to those who were murdered there and to the families, survivors, and first responders who continue to bear the physical and emotional consequences of those attacks.

We want to be clear: our objection is to radical Islamist terrorism and the ideology that inspired the attacks. At the same time, your desire to demonstrate inclusion should not cause the suffering and sacrifice associated with the World Trade Center to be minimized, overlooked, used for political pandering, or separated from the meaning of that sacred site.

There were 16 sites in New York State that you chose with numerous others available. It is therefore our belief that there was absolutely no justifiable reason to have used the WTC for this purpose. We believe One World Trade Center and the Ground Zero site should be treated with exceptional care and reverence. To those of us who served there, your decision to utilize the WTC for this purpose was extremely tone deaf, insensitive, and an affront to us, our families, and all of those who were affected by this attack. Your action displayed neither concern nor reverence for the fallen.

As the 25th anniversary of September 11 approaches, we respectfully but unequivocally ask that you refrain from attending the official commemoration at Ground Zero.

We respect the Office of the Governor of the State of New York. Respect for that office, however, does not require silence when we believe that a decision has caused real pain to those who sacrificed the most. Your presence at this year's commemoration risks creating an unnecessary controversy on a day that should remain focused entirely on remembrance. In light of your actions, we strongly believe that you have forfeited the right to stand at Ground Zero to Remember alongside us, 9/11 families, and first responders.

The 25th anniversary is not about politics, publicity, constituencies, or any individual's agenda. It should be about those who were murdered, their families, the survivors, and the first responders who ran toward danger while others were escaping it. It should also honor the men and women who continue to live with serious illnesses and other lasting consequences of their service.

We patrolled and protected the World Trade Center. We knew the people who worked there. We responded when it was attacked in 1993, and we responded again in 2001. We watched as our brothers and sisters disappeared into the smoke and devastation.

Thirty-seven Port Authority Police Officers never came home. Forty-seven additional members of our Port Authority family never came home. Thousands of other families lost loved ones, health, security, and peace of mind. September 11 is their day of remembrance.

If you wish to express your sympathy and support for the victims, survivors, and families, you may do so through a public statement or from another appropriate location. We ask only that Ground Zero not become the setting for another controversy on a day that belongs to those whose lives were forever changed by the attacks.

Please consider the widow who still mourns her husband; the child who grew up without a parent; the retired officer who lives each day with the physical consequences of working at Ground Zero; the families who continue to visit the Memorial; and the Port Authority Police Officers who stood together that morning and lost thirty-seven of our own.

We ask you to demonstrate the respect and judgment that this solemn anniversary requires. Please allow the families to grieve, the survivors to remember, the first responders to honor their fallen, and the men and women who called the World Trade Center their home to observe this day in peace. We reiterate our demand that you do not attend this year's 9/11 ceremony at Ground Zero.

We were there. We remember. We have not forgotten, and we will continue to honor the sacrifice of our brothers, sisters, and the entire Port Authority family.

Respectfully,

John McDevitt
President
Port Authority Retired Police Association